

## **PRE-HEARING BILL ANALYSIS**

**What is the reason for this bill? (e.g. a recent court decision or regulatory decision, a constituent concern, a matter raised by local leaders in your district, etc.)**

This bill comes in response to community and nonprofit interest in various regional trails systems and a lack of adequate outdoor recreational opportunities for Texans.

**What issue does this bill seek to address? (e.g. a statute needs updating, a governmental entity needs new authority to fulfill its obligation or no longer should be charged with undertaking certain responsibilities, something undesirable occurs too frequently or something desirable occurs too infrequently, an occupation is overregulated or in need of additional oversight, etc.)**

Texas ranks among the top states in the diversity of flora and fauna. Despite this, Texas is failing to meet the demand for outdoor engagement. According to a 2001 study conducted by Texas Parks and Wildlife, an additional 1.4 million acres of parkland were needed inside the Houston-DFW-San Antonio population triangle — more than twice the amount that existed statewide at the time to meet the recreational needs of the communities. This disparity between parklands and population has only widened in the last 20 years. According to the 2018 Texas Outdoor Recreation Plan, over a quarter of residents (28%) indicate that their community lacks various outdoor recreation opportunities. Trails were among the top opportunities cited as lacking. Opportunities exist to strategically connect state, local, and federal parklands with cooperation from private landowners to offer expanded hiking, biking, and horseback riding opportunities for Texans. Coordination and planning from a state agency can be a critical asset in helping actualize this connectivity and create regional trail systems.

**How does this bill seek to resolve the issue(s)?**

This bill would direct the Parks and Wildlife Department of Texas to conduct a study and issue a report on the feasibility of establishing a regional connected trails system throughout the state that provides recreational opportunities and highlights the state's scenery, wildlife, and history. Recreational trails can play an important role in encouraging Texans to get outside and can offer health benefits such as reducing blood pressure, lowering the risk of cardiovascular disease, and improving mental health. CSHB 4499 is a legislative council draft and makes no substantive changes to the bill as introduced.